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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000116

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [ETRD](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: YOUNGER OFFICERS REINVIGORATE CUSTOMS AFTER COUP

REF: CONAKRY 88

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A recent discussion with a mid-level Customs officer revealed that Guinea's Customs Bureau faces an ongoing leadership challenge following the removal of the bureau's long-serving director, and that port revenues have declined by at least 50% since the beginning of the year due in part to the uncertain political and economic climate. In spite of these challenges, morale is reportedly high among younger officers, many of whom have been recently promoted. The officer also noted that relations with BIVAG-Veritas, an independent receipts verification firm, remain strained. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On 19 February, A/Polchief and Poloff met with Amadou Kaba, a Customs inspector with the Mobile Brigade who has worked in the National Customs Bureau for 19 years. Kaba has frequently provided reliable information to the Embassy in the past.

BUREAU LEADERSHIP UNCERTAIN

13. (SBU) Describing the events leading up to the recent public sacking of National Customs Director Olga Syradin (reftel), Kaba said that Syradin had been at the agency for over 16 years, and had served as director for the last six. During that time, he claimed that Syradin had appointed family members such as her sister and other "favorites" to key positions. Reportedly, resentment of Syradin's long tenure among younger officers eager to move up in rank had been building for years. Though Syradin was fired several weeks ago, the date for her successor's formal installation at Customs remains uncertain, since CNDD president Dadis Camara has not yet issued an appointment decree. Since Syradin's dismissal, Deputy Director and CNDD-member Alpha Yaya Diallo, a reliable Embassy contact before the coup d'etat, currently manages the day-to-day operations of the agency.

14. (SBU) According to Kaba, the new director, Mamadi Toure, has the support of most Customs officers, especially the "younger generation." Toure has supposedly been positioning himself to become director for over three years, frequently using the fact that he has worked in almost every department within Customs as proof of his fitness for the top post. Other sources claim that Toure--a mid-level Customs inspector--was only appointed to the job after he paid a bribe to unnamed National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) members. Toure is reportedly close to CNDD Vice President and Minister of Defense, Sekouba Konate. Deputy Director Diallo told POL LES in a separate meeting that he does not believe that Toure has the skills to run Customs competently.

YOUNGER WORKERS REINVIGORATED

15. (SBU) In contrast to the leadership muddle, Kaba described a re-energized environment at Customs. He noted that efficiency and morale among the workers was quite high, and that younger workers seem eager to prove their competency and abilities. According to Kaba, this group identifies with and supports Dadis, but sees older workers tied to the corrupt practices of the previous administration.

PORT RECEIPTS DOWN BY HALF

16. (U) While efficiency may be higher, Kaba said the volume of goods entering Conakry's port has decreased by over 50% since the beginning of the year, which many sources blame on Guinea's tentative political environment and global financial upheaval. Kaba estimated that the port alone accounts for between 80% and 90% of Guinea's customs revenues, followed by Koundara on the Senegalese border, Kouremale on the Malian border, and the mining ports of Kamsar and Binty. According to Kaba, customs fees nationwide account for 60% of the government's revenue stream. (NOTE: No dollar figures or other statistics were available to verify this claim. Further, Kaba's claim that Customs provides 60% of government revenues is at odds with previous reports that mining sector taxes and royalties provide the government with well over

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half of its revenue. END NOTE.)

RELATIONS REMAINED STRAINED WITH VERITAS

17. (SBU) Kaba expressed mixed opinions about BIVAG-Veritas, a private company that certifies custom receipts, and which the GoG accepted as a precondition to approving Guinea's three-year IMF Poverty Reduction program. While Kaba stated that Veritas' quality control of imports was valuable--even if detested by local businessmen seeking to avoid duties at all costs--he felt that Customs was more than capable of assessing taxes on imports on its own.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Deputy Director Diallo's admission that he believes his incoming boss is essentially incompetent may signal an upcoming leadership struggle within the organization. High morale and increased efficiency among young Customs officers appears to be another sign that Guinea's youth are energized by Dadis Camara and generally supportive of the CNDD. END COMMENT.
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